



WASHINGTON BUREAU
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

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July 8, 2002

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, CY-B402
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 02-150
Application by the BellSouth Corporation for Authorization Under Section
271 of the Communications Act to Provide In-Region, Interlata Services in
the States of Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and South
Carolina

Dear Ms. Dortch:

I am writing to urge the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to approve the application of BellSouth to expand long-distance service to consumers in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization, as such, our principal objective is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of racial and ethnic minority citizens of United States and to eliminate racial prejudice. It is clear to me that all consumers, irrespective of where they work, study or reside should have access to affordable and comprehensive telecommunications services.

Telephone consumers generally benefit when local telephone companies are permitted to compete in the long distance market. BellSouth's entry into the long distance market will spur competition. That competition is likely to result in decreases in the long-distance prices paid by many customers. It has already proven to be the case in New York where the local telephone company now competes for long-distance service. Certainly, consumers in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina – many of whom are our members – ought to have the same opportunity for substantial savings and competitive service as consumers in Connecticut, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Of equal importance, are public and private efforts to reduce the discriminatory impact that the lack of access to advanced telecommunications services has on underserved rural and low-income urban areas – where many racial and ethnic minority Americans work and reside. NAACP President Kweisi Mfume noted during a discussion on the gap between the digital haves and have-nots, “the technological segregation known as the digital divide” threatens the very health and prosperity of underserved communities. The rate for the deployment of high-speed Internet access to underserved communities is far

too low.

The Department of Commerce and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) released in February a comprehensive report entitled, *A Nation Online: How Americans Are Expanding Their Use of the Internet* that provides information on Americans' connectivity to the Internet, broadband services and computers. The report found that as of September 2001: Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander descent were most likely to have Internet access. Of that group, 60.4% had Internet access at least one location from age 3 and older. Some 59.9% of White Americans have Internet access in at least one location as well. African American and Hispanic Americans trail both groups by a wide margin with only 39.8% and 31.6% respectively, report Internet access from age 3 and older. Healthy competition contributes significantly in forging greater access to these new and necessary technological advancements.

Additionally, the FCC should approve this application because it is in the public interest to enable a good corporate citizen to spur economic development and competition that will benefit racial and ethnic minority communities. Upgrading the network infrastructure and expanding the number of services offered to compete in long distance services has the potential to create new jobs and business opportunities for African-American workers and businesses. BellSouth has an established history of purchasing long distance advertising from African American as well as other racial and ethnic minority-media, and will likely continue and extend this practice of out- reach to minority vendors for a number of other services.

If there is anything else I can do assist in the favorable consideration of BellSouth's application to extend affordable telephone service options to needy consumers in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina, please don't hesitate to contact me at (202) 638-2269.

Sincerely,

Hilary O. Shelton

Hilary O. Shelton
Director

cc: Chairman Michael K. Powell
Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Kevin J. Martin